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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 000362

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TAGS: [BK](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA - DODIK RATCHETS UP THREAT TO PURSUE INDEPENDENCE

REF: A. SARAJEVO 331

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 348

Classified By: Ambassador Charles English. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

Summary

[11.](#) (C) RS Prime Minister Milorad Dodik's February 21 speech to the RSNA asserted recognition of Kosovo creates new rights for the RS and laid out conditions that, if not met, would justify an RS independence referendum. Dodik's conditions are intentionally unattainable and attempt to shape debate in a way that will cast Serbs as being reluctantly forced into a referendum by the actions of the international community and the intransigence of Bosniaks and Croats. Haris Silajdzic's provocative Bosniak nationalist politics and his propensity to engage in rhetorical combat with Dodik will play directly into this strategy. Dodik stopped short of an explicit statement calling for a referendum now, however.

Nonetheless, Dodik's speech ties together each of the discrete anti-Dayton policies that he has advocated in recent months, including devolution of state competencies, rejection of OHR legitimacy, Kosovo-RS parallels. The speech also threatens the cessation of RS cooperation with OHR and the international community-driven reform process. Although Dodik was careful to include conciliatory language in the address to deflect international criticism, the most important messages contained in his remarks were those that implied the future of the RS might be outside Bosnia. Later in the evening, the RSNA adopted a resolution claiming the right to self-determination and the right to call a referendum on the status of the RS. Although we do not expect Dodik to invoke this right in the coming weeks, an existential crisis seems inevitable. End Summary.

RSNA Address

[12.](#) (C) Following his address to the February 21 rally in Belgrade, Republika Srpska Prime Minister Milorad Dodik returned to Banja Luka to address an emergency evening session of the RS National Assembly. Although his speech in Belgrade included little beyond expressions of solidarity with the Serbian people, his RSNA address constituted a carefully worded attempt to portray a political environment under which Bosnian Serbs have no alternative but to reassess their participation in the state. Dodik's speech, although laced with conciliatory comments about Bosnia's European future, identified three principles on which he intends to proceed: 1) the international community, including OHR, no longer have legitimacy to direct events in Bosnia; 2) failure to accept the existence of the RS by Bosniaks and Croats will

prompt the RS to reconsider its place in Bosnia; 3) Kosovo independence has established a precedent that applies directly to the RS.

Dodik Rejects IC Role in Bosnia

¶13. (C) In the speech Dodik directly challenged the legitimacy of the international community role in Bosnia. He stated that the RS is in a state of "democratic rebellion" against the international community who "believe that it is enough to have one of the Ambassadors call and say what needs to be done." Dodik accused the international community of seeking to "expand its authority" in Bosnia, adding, "they will probably see even this Assembly as a reason to keep OHR here." He dismissed the role of the international community in Bosnia's reform process stating that "no intervention of the International Community here is going to be successful as long as I lead and stand here before you." He added a call for all international led reforms in Bosnia to stop, threatening "or there will be no reforms at all."

Kosovo-RS Parallels

¶14. (C) Dodik drew explicit parallels between the Kosovo Declaration of independence and the status of the RS. He described Kosovo as a very dangerous precedent and stated that it is "impossible that it is not related" to the RS. He added that international recognition of Kosovo "represents verification or creation of a new right, new practice and new principles," adding that "we can understand this recognition as a sign that the RS can also count on this right in the future."

SARAJEVO 00000362 002 OF 003

Declaration of Responsibility

¶15. (C) In a reference to the SNSD proposed Declaration of Responsibility to be considered by the state parliament, Dodik implied that a defeat of the measure by Bosniaks and Croats require Serbs to reconsider their place within the Bosnian state (Ref A). He invited "Bosniaks and Croats in BiH to deal with our problems without international interventions" and affirm the permanence of the RS under Dayton in order to determine the path the RS must take. Dodik stated that the failure of the Declaration would constitute "a clear sign for us on how we are seen and what is expected from us, and we will have to adopt policies which might be motivated by events in Kosovo."

RS Referendum

¶16. (C) He noted that the RS policy of challenging past transfers of competencies to the state constitutes the beginning of an "unstoppable and irrevocable path towards democratization and protection of its rights." He went on to state that the RS will not hesitate to "check the opinion of its citizens on its status in a referendum." He exhorted the RSNA to pass a resolution setting "clear boundaries" regarding RS intentions to initiate a referendum adding that "no one has the right to prohibit us to contemplate about ourselves in different ways."

RSNA Resolution

¶17. (SBU) Following Dodik's remarks the RSNA passed a resolution stating that it does not recognize Kosovo independence, condemning countries that recognize Kosovo, and stating that if a substantial number of UN members recognize Kosovo it will establish an equivalent RS right to self determination including disassociation. The resolution

states that the RS will undertake the "procedure of determining its constitutional and legal status" if BiH institutions do not accept the "Dayton position and competencies of the RS." Although RSNA conclusions have discussed referenda in the past this constitutes the first time the body has specified conditions that will result in a move towards independence.

Conciliatory Remarks for Political Cover

18. (C) Dodik attempted to interlace his remarks with comments designed to allow him to continue to assert that he remains committed to Bosnia's European future. He condemned violence, reiterated his goal of a multi-ethnic RS and claimed that the RS has contributed "enormous efforts" to stabilizing Bosnia and contributing to its European path. Dodik will inevitably cite these statements to defend himself against criticism of the international community. He also meticulously avoided statements implying direct causality between the actions of Federation-based politicians and referenda and/or RS independence.

Bosniak and Croat Angle

19. (C) Dodik called on Bosniaks and Croats to accept the RS and invited them to deal with "our problems without international interventions." However, Dodik asserted that Bosnian Serbs wanted to know whether the RS is "questionable" to others. That's why, Dodik argued, he wanted the Dayton Constitution confirmed by Bosnia's state-level parliament. (Comment: This was a reference to the SNSD-proposed Declaration of Responsibility, which could be considered by parliament on March 5. It contains deliberately provocation language confirming the RS's status as a "state entity. End Note) Dodik warned that if "this recognition" of the RS "stays absent for us" and we will have to adopt some other policies which might be motivated by events in Kosovo." Earlier in his remarks, Dodik had implicitly linked the failure to accept the RS with "the new right" of self-determination enjoyed by the RS as result of international recognition of Kosovo.

Comment

110. (C) Judging from his speech, the expected extension of the OHR mandate during the February 25-26 meeting of the

SARAJEVO 00000362 003 OF 003

Peace Implementation Council may prompt Dodik to assert that the continued presence of the international community violates the integrity of the RS and will require the RS to reconsider its status within Bosnia. At the very least Dodik has signaled that he will no longer recognize the legitimacy of OHR and is not bound by the Bonn Powers. If OHR extension, in itself, does not precipitate escalation by Dodik, attempts by the High Representative to ensure that the objectives established by the PIC are implemented (in both their letter and their spirit) may prompt Dodik to provoke another crisis. Haris Silajdzic assumes the Chairmanship of the Tri-Presidency on March 6. He has already signaled his intent to return to the "legal option" of eliminating the RS through implementation of the ICJ verdict. It is certain that Silajdzic's strategy will inevitably cross Dodik's stated redlines at some point during his Chairmanship.

111. (C) Comment Continued. Regardless, we see Dodik's RSNA speech as the culmination of sixteen months of challenging the Bosnian state and Dayton. By conditioning the continued participation of the RS on standards of accommodation by Bosniaks and Croats that he and other SNSD members know they will not meet and by drawing parallels between the RS and Kosovo, Dodik has established a framework under which it seems inevitable that he will attempt to challenge the

structure of the state. Although we do not anticipate that will occur in the near future, developments outside of the RS, including in Sarajevo and Kosovo could precipitate the measures called for in the RSNA resolution sooner than expected. End Comment.

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